

# Halifax Hospice to help terminally ill live comfortably

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## Plans for 10-bed, \$6-million building revealed



The construction site for Hospice Halifax is seen on Monday afternoon. The hospice, which is being built next to the Atlantic School of Theology in south-end Halifax, is scheduled to open in fall 2018.

A life well lived deserves a fitting and dignified end.

"Hospice is about living life well to the end versus being about dying," Wendy Fraser, chief executive officer of Halifax Hospice, said Monday as the non-profit organization unveiled plans for its \$6-million south-end Halifax building.

"There are ways to make sure that people's needs are met, that the music they want is there and that the food that they like is made for them. It's really about living well to the end."

The hospice society has existed for 15 years, said Fraser, and a purpose-built hospice has always been the goal.

The two-storey, 10-bed hospice to be built on leased Atlantic School of Theology property will provide comfort for those with end-of-life diagnoses and their families.

"It's really about ensuring people aren't in pain and that they are kept comfortable," Fraser said. "We don't offer treatment at hospice, we just offer comfort care."

Designed by architect Anne Sinclair and being constructed by Lindsay Construction of Dartmouth, the 15,000-square-foot building is expected to be completed by late next summer.

"After years of planning and months of site preparation, it is enormously gratifying for everyone involved to see the hospice physically taking shape," Dr. Jane Henderson, board chairwoman of Hospice Halifax, said in a news release.

"In a year's time, Hospice Halifax will be a reality, providing specialized care to the dying and compassionate support to their loved ones."

When construction is complete, considerable time will be set aside to hire and train staff that will include 24-hour medical staff of two to three nurses or licensed practical nurses per shift.

"We'll have a combination of therapeutic support and volunteers providing support," Fraser said. "It may be the support where you are sitting with someone whose family might not be there right now or you're playing cards with them or you're engaging with them."

Hospice Halifax, buoyed by about 150 active volunteers, has a 99-year lease with the theology school. The hospice society originally planned to renovate wooden buildings at 618 and 620 Francklyn Street but moved on to a new plan when the old houses proved to be structurally inferior. The design of the new building will reflect the style of the original buildings and complement the tree-lined streets of the neighbourhood.

"The new construction looks so beautiful," Fraser said. "It honours the original houses there. In order to really do best practices and to have a modern facility, this was the best choice."

The hospice will offer physical, emotional and spiritual care for 10 patients who will be housed in private, home-like rooms with a living area for family and friends to visit at any time.

"Just to offer the things that volunteers can do to really make this a special time, both for the person who is dying and their family members," Fraser said. "We know that 80 per cent of people want to die at home but only 20 per cent are able to. That's often because it takes a small army to support somebody at home. They can really get burnt out by the end of it."

"This allows caregivers to be family members again, to be the daughter or the wife or the son rather than being the nurse. All the medical support is going to be provided by our nursing staff and the family can be with their loved one as family."

The cost of the ongoing care will be split evenly between Hospice Halifax, which is raising money now for the construction and operation of the hospice, and the Nova Scotia Health Authority. There will be no charge for those staying at the hospice.

The health authority will eventually allot less money for hospital palliative care, diverting funds toward the hospice instead.

The hospice will be the first of its kind in Nova Scotia, although facilities are in the planning stages for Kentville and Sydney.

The new building will provide the hospice with space for its weekly bereavement groups, to provide training and a place for caregivers to chat and be with other people who are experiencing the same life-limiting illnesses.

Fraser said part of the job of Halifax Hospice is to educate people about the emotional and financial benefit of hospice.

"From a bottom-line perspective, it is very expensive to die in hospital and we have an aging population. It's about \$800 to \$1,200 a day in a hospital bed and \$475 in a hospice bed. The cost to society and government goes down substantially."

The average stay in a Canadian hospice is three weeks.

"This is going to mean that people have an alternative, that they have choices at end of life and that if staying at home is no longer possible, they'll know that they will have a home-like environment and that their needs will be taken care of."

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